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EDWARD COATE PINKNEY.

It is not the purpose of this article to enter into a discussion of the comparative merits and demerits of poetry at the South, but simply to call attention anew to an almost forgotten poet, one who lives barely in the memory of a single song. Future historians of Southern literary conditions will have to note among others, one important fact: there is hardly a Southern poet who is not a "one-poem poet." Why all else has been buried and only one song remains cannot easily be explained. Music has fettered the fleeting character of some; patriotism has enshrined others in people's hearts; and elocution, that bane of all good verse, has drawn the life out of still others as a price for making them famous. Pinkney lives in "A Health," Key in "The Star-Spangled Banner," Wilde in "My Life is Like a Summer Rose," Cooke in "Florence Vane," O'Hara in "The Bivouac of the Dead," Ticknor in "The Virginians of the Valley," and Father Ryan in "The Conquered Banner." Another curious fact is that the popularity of these poems is almost without exception in inverse ratio to their quality. Key and Pinkney were both Marylanders, and one would not think for a moment of comparing as to literary worth the latter's exquisite lyric with Key's bombastic effusion; yet they are building a monument to Key, and Pinkney is not even a name to many of the reading public. I may therefore perhaps be pardoned, in this age of research and the revivification of forgotten worthies, for presenting a brief sketch of his life and poetry.

Pinkney came of a distinguished family, no fewer than six of whom are entitled to honorable mention in Appleton's "Cyclopædia of American Biography." His father, William Pinkney, attained in the early history of our republic to the highest rank as a diplomatist, statesman, and lawyer. Judge Story said of him that his was "one of the proudest names

in the annals of the American bar ;” and Chief Justice Marshall gave him high praise by saying that “he never knew his equal as a reasoner.” William’s brother, Ninian, who distinguished himself as a soldier in the war of 1812, made a tour of the south of France in 1797-8, and published in London his souvenirs of travel under the title of “Travels through the South of France . . . by a route never before performed.” The book caused a sensation in the literary world, and Leigh Hunt wrote that “it set all the idle world to going to France to live on the charming banks of the Loire.” Another son of William Pinkney, Frederick, survived his older brother many years, and his poems and songs, published during the late war, became very popular.

It might be truly said of Edward Coate (or Coote) Pinkney that he came into this world with the proverbial silver spoon in his mouth. He was born in London, October, 1, 1802, while his father was resident there as Minister to England. In 1811 the family returned to its home in Baltimore and young Pinckney entered St. Mary’s College in that city. Here he remained as a student until he was fourteen years old. In 1816 he received a midshipman’s commission in the United States navy. This position he retained for six years, during which time he was stationed in the Mediterranean and at several foreign ports. While in this service he had a fine opportunity for seeing the most famous spots in the Old World, and this may not have been without influence on his poetical development. In 1822 he left the navy, two reasons being assigned for the action. One is that he resigned on account of his father’s death, which occurred that year. The other is that he had a quarrel with Commodore Ridgely, his superior officer, whom he challenged, it is said, to a duel. The Commodore treated the challenge as a boyish freak, and refused to pay any attention to it. This so angered Pinkney that he posted his commander on the streets of Baltimore as a coward, and then resigned from the service. Whatever may have been the reason, he must afterwards have regretted his action, as

three years later we find him trying to enter again the naval service, this time of Mexico.

After his resignation, Pinkney settled in Baltimore and began the study of law. While keeping this up, he evidently found time to make love and write poetry, the one being, as we shall see later, the natural outcome of the other. It is stated that most, if not all, of his poems were written in the period between his twentieth and twenty-second years. One of these —“Rodolph,”— which Griswold surmises was written on the Mediterranean, was published anonymously in 1823 in Baltimore. Outside of the poetical inspiration given him in his love affairs, he seems to have had little encouragement in Baltimore for writing. That city has never been much of a literary centre, though its good people would doubtless resent Dr. Holmes’s calling it “the gastronomic metropolis of the Union,” if they thought that implied a lack as to things of the mind. A few years after Pinkney’s death Poe found it “not the most promising field for a young and friendless poet to seek his fortune in.” There were then two literary sets in the city, one made up of the amiable Kennedy, the author of “Horseshoe Robinson,” and his friends, and the other composed of a number of obscure young men just beginning to make names for themselves in literature. If one of these sets was in existence during Pinkney’s lifetime, we may readily believe he was a “hail-fellow-well-met” with all his associates.

Pinkney seems not to have tried to make a living by literature, and he must have had some means, for he was married in 1824 to Miss Georgie McCausland, a beautiful young lady of Baltimore. The same year he was admitted to the bar. The following year he published a collective edition of his poems under the title of “Rodolph and Other Poems.” This little volume, mean and insignificant to the eye, and a wretched specimen of book-making, contains within its seventy-six pages his entire poetical output. And yet, though the greater portion of its contents is not worth preserving, it holds enough to make it precious in the eyes

of all lovers of true poetry. The longest poem, "Rodolph," is a fragment, somewhat Byronic in story and treatment, full of obscurity, misanthropy, and despair. Its verse is extremely wooden at times, and there is nothing in the poem that is inviting to the reader. It is amazing that Duyckinck should have thus praised it so highly: "It is a powerful sketch of a broken life of passion and remorse, of a husband slain by the lover of his wife, of her early death in a convent, and of the paramour's wanderings and wild mental anticipations. Though a fragment, wanting in fullness of design and the last polish of execution, it is a poem of power and mark. There is an occasional inner music in the lines, demonstrative of the true poet. The imagery is happy and original." Griswold, it seems to me, has really expressed the right criticism on it when he says: "There is no novelty in the story, and not much can be said for its morality. . . . It has more faults than Pinkney's other works." Though, as will be seen later, it was Pinkney's ill fate "to fall into the hands of the Reverend Mr. Griswold," yet the latter can hardly be blamed for criticising "Rodolph" as he did.

Pinkney is seen in a much better light in certain of the short poems of this volume. His lines on "Italy," in evident imitation of Goethe's famous song of Mignon in "Wilhelm Meister," are strikingly expressed:

Know'st thou the land which lovers ought to choose?
 Like blessings there descend the sparkling dews;
 In gleaming streams the crystal rivers run,
 The purple vintage clusters in the sun;
 Odors of flowers haunt the balmy breeze,
 Rich fruits hang high upon the verdant trees;
 And vivid blossoms gem the shady groves,
 Where bright-plumed birds discourse their careless loves.
 Beloved! — speed we from this sullen strand,
 Until thy light feet press that green shore's yellow sand.

Look seaward thence, and naught shall meet thine eye
 But fairy isles, like paintings on the sky;
 And flying fast and free before the gale,
 The gaudy vessel with its glancing sail;
 And waters glittering in the glare of noon,

Or touch'd with silver by the stars and moon,
Or fleck'd with broken lines of crimson light,
When the far fisher's fire affronts the night.
Lovely as loved ! toward that smiling shore
Bear we our household gods, to fix forever more.

It looks a dimple on the face of earth,
The seal of beauty, and the shrine of mirth ;
Nature is delicate and graceful there,
The place's genius, feminine and fair ;
The winds are awed, nor dare to breathe aloud ;
The air seems never to have borne a cloud,
Save where volcanoes send to heaven their curl'd
And solemn smokes, like altars of the world.
Thrice beautiful ! — to that delightful spot
Carry our married hearts, and be all pain forgot.

There Art, too, shows, when nature's beauty palls,
Her sculptured marbles, and her pictured walls ;
And there are forms in which they both conspire
To whisper themes that know not how to tire ;
The speaking ruins in that gentle clime
Have but been hallow'd by the hand of Time,
And each can mutely prompt some thought of flame :
The meanest stone is not without a name.
Then come, beloved ! — hasten o'er the sea,
To build our happy hearth in blooming Italy."

These vigorous verses clearly show the influence of Pinkney's life on the Mediterranean, and we do not wonder at the spell the "land of poetry and of song" threw over him just as it had done over the impassionable German poet thirty years before. Another poem, "The Voyager's Song," is full of the breath of the sea :

Sound trumpets, ho ! — weigh anchor — loosen sail —
The seaward flying banners chide delay ;
As if 'twere heaven that breathes this kindly gale,
Our life-like bark beneath it speeds away.

The poems, however, in which Pinkney is seen at his best and by which posterity remembers him, are his love songs : "Serenade," "A Picture-Song," "A Health," and one or two untitled "Songs." It is said that the inspiration and subject of these poems was a young lady of Baltimore, Miss Mary Hawkins, a noted belle and beauty of the

time. Pinkney, it seems, was deeply in love with her, but his wooing and beautiful verses were without avail. Like "Annie of Tharaw," she married another. It is an easy feat to imagine with what fervor the unfortunate poet sang to her his "Serenade," and drank to her that incomparable "Health." History but repeats itself in these unhappy loves of men of genius, and Pinkney is by no means the only poet that has embalmed in glowing verse one that left his love unrequited.

These little songs give Mr. Stedman occasion to speak of Pinkney as singing his "Lovelace lyrics," and if we make allowance for environment, the remark is not inappropriate, though I would not say that Pinkney wrote anything that approaches the perfection of "To Althea in Prison." It seems to me that the "Serenade" has something of the Caroline lyrical flavor:

Look out upon the stars, my love,
 And shame them with thine eyes,
 On which, than on the lights above.
 There hang more destinies.
 Night's beauty is the harmony
 Of blending shades and light;
 Then, lady, up,—look out and be
 A sister to the night!

Sleep not! — thine image wakes for aye
 Within my watching breast:
 Sleep not! — from her soft sleep should fly,
 Who robs all hearts of rest.
 Nay, lady, from thy slumbers break
 And make this darkness gay
 With looks, whose brightness well might make
 Of darker nights a day.

Another little "Song" is more lively:

Day departs this upper air,
 My lovely, lovely lady;
 And the eve-star sparkles fair,
 And our good steeds are ready.
 Leave, leave these loveless halls,
 So lordly though they be; —
 Come, come — affection calls —
 Away at once with me.

Sweet thy words in sense as sound,
And gladly do I hear them;
Though thy kinsmen are around,
And tamer bosoms fear them.
Mount, mount, — I'll keep thee, dear,
In safety as we ride; —
On, on, — my heart is here,
My sword is at my side!"

A poem of another kind and lacking the indefinable charm of the "Serenade," is "A Picture-Song:"

"How may this little tablet feign
The features of a face,
Which o'er informs with loveliness,
Its proper share of space;
Or human hands on ivory,
Enable us to see
The charms, that all must wonder at,
Thou work of gods in thee!
But yet, methinks, that sunny smile
Familiar stories tells,
And I should know those placid eyes,
Two crystal shaded wells;
Nor can my soul, the limner's art
Attesting with a sigh,
Forget the blood that deck'd thy cheek,
As rosy clouds the sky.
They could not seemle what thou art,
More excellent than fair,
As soft as sleep or pity is,
And pure as mountain-air;
But here are common, earthly hues,
To such an aspect wrought,
That none, save thine, can seem so like
The beautiful in thought.
The song I sing, thy likeness like,
Is painful mimicry
Of something better, which is now
A memory to me,
Who have upon life's frozen sea
Arrived the icy spot,
Where man's magnetic feelings show
Their guiding task forgot.
The sportive hopes, that used to chase
Their shifting shadows on,
Like children playing in the sun,
Are gone — forever gone;

And on a careless, sullen peace,
 My double-fronted mind,
 Like Janus when his gates were shut,
 Looks forward and behind.

Apollo placed his harp, of old,
 Awhile upon a stone,
 Which has resounded since, when struck,
 A breaking harp-string's tone;
 And thus my heart, though wholly now,
 From early softness free,
 If touch'd, will yield the music yet,
 It first received of thee.

The finest song, however, of Pinkney's collection is the famous "Health," which Poe spoke of as "a poem of so much brilliancy and power." It is a trite remark to say that if Pinkney is to be kept in lasting remembrance, it is by this one poem. By its side all the rest of his slight productions pale into insignificance. All the anthologies contain it, but one may be pardoned for reproducing it here :

I fill this cup to one made up
 Of loveliness alone,
 A woman, of her gentle sex
 The seeming paragon;
 To whom the better elements
 And kindly stars have given
 A form so fair, that, like the air,
 'Tis less of earth than heaven.

Her every tone is music's own,
 Like those of morning birds,
 And something more than melody
 Dwells ever in her words;
 The coinage of her heart are they,
 And from her lips each flows.
 As one may see the burden'd bee
 Forth issue from the rose.

Affections are as thoughts to her,
 The measures of her hours;
 Her feelings have the fragrancy,
 The freshness of young flowers;
 And lovely passions, changing oft,
 So fill her, she appears
 The image of themselves by turns,—
 The idol of past years!

Of her bright face one glance will trace
A picture on the brain,
And of her voice in echoing hearts
A sound must long remain;
But memory, such as mine of her,
So very much endears,
When death is nigh my latest sigh
Will not be life's, but hers.

I fill'd this cup to one made up
Of loveliness alone,
A woman, of her gentle sex
The seeming paragon —
Her health! and would on earth there stood
Some more of such a frame,
That life might be all poetry,
And weariness a name.

Despite the prestige of his father's name and his own acknowledged ability, Pinkney made a decided failure at the bar. Perhaps, like Timrod, he "was too wholly a poet to keep company long with so relentless, rugged, and exacting a mistress as the law." He could secure but few clients, and after a year's practice, with poverty staring him in the face, he quit the profession and went to Mexico with the intention of entering the navy of that country. When, however, he presented himself to Commodore Porter, who was in command, he failed to secure a place, owing probably to the fact that the Mexican navy was at that time full. While waiting for a vacancy to occur or something "to turn up," he got into an unfortunate quarrel with a native. This led to a duel in which the Mexican was killed and, as a result, Pinkney had to flee the country. He returned home, "disappointed, discouraged, and almost crushed by sickness and sorrow."

Again he tried the law, but without success. However, in 1826 he received recognition in a literary way by his election as professor of rhetoric and belles-lettres in the University of Maryland. Unfortunately it was an office of honor without any emolument. In December, 1827, a paper in the interest of John Quincy Adams, entitled *The Marylander*, appeared in Baltimore, and Pinkney was chosen editor. He soon made a reputation in this new sphere, his

style being noted for its grace and vigor, though marred by extreme party-spirit and merciless invective. But this good fortune did not long continue. His health, which had been feeble for some time, began rapidly to decline, and on April 11, 1828 he died, aged only twenty-five years and six months. He was buried in Greenmount Cemetery, Baltimore.

In his admirable life of Poe Professor Woodberry gives it as his opinion that Pinkney died "from the effects of poverty and discouragement suffered just as his genius was breaking forth." It seems to me that this statement must be taken with a grain of salt. Pinkney was certainly not entirely neglected before his death, and besides he had practically published all his existing poems before he was twenty-three. With the exception of his editorial work we have no record that he wrote anything after the publication of his little volume in 1825. Whether this was due to the indifference of the public cannot be known, but I doubt if we shall be far wrong in supposing that such was the case. Still one cannot but think that Pinkney, like Poe, brought much of his trouble on himself. We are told that he was dissipated, and from the meagre facts of his life we can gather that his nature was such as to get him constantly into trouble. He was doubtless rash, impulsive, and headstrong, warm in his friendships and violent in his dislikes,—in fact, a typical young Southerner of the olden time. Yet he must have had all the fine qualities of that class, for it is said that he was generous to a fault, having even been known to pawn valuable jewelry in order to help those in want.

Poe put himself on record about Pinkney in a way that seems to us extraordinary. In his essay on "The Poetic Principle," after commenting on "A Health," he says: "It was the misfortune of Mr. Pinkney to have been born too far south. Had he been born a New Englander, it is probable that he would have been ranked as the first of American lyrists, by that magnanimous cabal which so long controlled the destinies of American Letters in conducting the thing called the *North American Review*." The only excuse

for reprinting this utterly uncalled for criticism rests on the plea of its being a curiosity, and an example what a sane critic, and Poe undoubtedly wrote a great deal of sane criticism, can sometimes say in moments of provocation and imagined injury. Did not Poe remember that in that very *North American Review* he had contemptuously called a "thing," there appeared in 1825, an appreciative review of Pinkney's poetry by Mr. F. W. P. Greenwood? Besides, the poet William Leggett contributed in 1827 an article on Pinkney to the New York *Mirror*, a journal of which, I believe, Poe was afterwards assistant editor. We are also told that when it was determined to publish biographical sketches of the few greatest poets of the country, with their portraits, Pinkney was requested to sit for his miniature to be used in the proposed volume.¹ After his death his poems were thrice republished: in Baltimore in 1838—a second edition of the little volume of 1825; in 1844, with a brief introduction, in the series of the *Mirror Library*, entitled "The Rococo;" in 1850 in Morris and Willis's "Prose and Poetry of Europe and America." His work was even favorably noticed in the London *Athenæum* for 1835. In the face of these facts a Southern critic² is abundantly justified in saying that no one "but a man of diseased mind and imagination, like Poe, would have uttered such sentiments as he did as to Edward Coate Pinkney."

Pinkney's life is a sad story, but its pathos should not cloud his real excellence as a poet. In a time when Sydney Smith's sneering remark, that "literature the Americans have none," was almost too true, Pinkney piped a few simple numbers that had in them the promise of better things. He was the forerunner of Poe, Pendleton Cooke, Timrod, Hayne, Meek, and the other songbirds of the Southern choir, and he shared the common fate of forerunners. Nothing could be more scant and limited than his poetical output, yet it is informed with some of the best qualities that belong

¹ I have no means of knowing if this volume was published.

² Colonel J. L. Peyton, of Virginia. Quoted in Richardson's *American Literature*, (II., 426-27.)

to true poetry — a haunting music, a peculiar grace of expression, and a remarkable sureness of touch. Even in the crudest portions of his poetry there are, as the Editor of this REVIEW says, “traces of a virility of thought and expression not usually perceptible in the work of American poets.”

Yet the Reverend Mr. Griswold had to come forward in order to destroy even this meed of praise. Only hear his remarkable effusion: “Pinkney’s is the first instance in this country in which we have to lament the prostitution of true poetical genius to unworthy purposes. Pervading much that he wrote there is a selfish melancholy and sullen pride; dissatisfaction with the present, and doubts in regard to the future life. The great distinguishing characteristic of American poetry is its pure and high morality. May it ever be so!” What did the worthy divine wish Pinkney to write? Sunday-school stories, forsooth? It is true that in “Rodolph” we see plenty of misanthropy *à la* Byron, and in some of the shorter poems we find such expressions as “my sacrifice of sullen years,” “my misused and blighted powers,” “my waste of miserable hours;” but who ever cared for “Rodolph” and these particular poems? Surely the reverend gentleman did not find “selfish melancholy and sullen pride” in the lyrics quoted above. Doubtless his mind was too narrow to appreciate any song, however beautiful, that touched on “love and wine and sunny skies,” and he seemed to lack utterly that love for the beautiful which, if wanting in the heart, Heine tells us, finds that “the sun is simply so many miles in circumference, and the trees are good for firewood, and the flowers are classified according to their stamens, and the water is wet.” We cannot be too thankful that our poet had no such Mentor at his elbow and that, in spite of poverty, discouragement, and the frailty of human nature, he left us a little legacy of song which, we trust, “the flight of years” cannot destroy.

CHARLES HUNTER ROSS.